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Herding as preparation for war

Preparation for war began in youth. When boys were about ten or twelve they were sent to herd goats or calves; when they were older they herded the cattle. At this time the boys were in the bush with their elders who were often haughty and fierce. The older herders taught the boys how to fight and how to defend themselves. They taught them to fight with twigs and sticks; the older herders fought with *izinduku* (knobkerries) and *izinkhonjo* (wooden swords). They were not allowed to fight with real spears though some had them. The older herders stirred up the hearts of the younger to fight and taught them to strike each other with knobkerries and to use little shields. If the herders of one village met the herders of another, the bulls were teased till they fought, and the little herders also. The small herders were not allowed to say anything about the herding to their parents. The older herders also loved to fight as in war with those of other villages. At such times the older men and even the elders came out from the village to see the battle and to stir up the hearts of the boys. If the herders of one village ran away they were laughed at, but the winners were greatly praised.

At the time when the cattle ate the refuse in the maize-gardens, after harvest, fighting most often broke out. Some of the boys provoked their neighbours to go and drive the cattle into the maize-fields of another village deliberately. The custom was that cattle might eat in the maize-gardens of their own village and the boys ought to ask if they may go into the fields of others. The herders did this to annoy the other herders and to start a fight. Often a great struggle was the result and the young men of the village who had outgrown herding joined in the fight to help the youngsters of their village. But they did it sensibly, none caused a wound with a spear, for anyone who did that was punished by law.

So the boys grew accustomed to the first steps in fighting which would help them later in war. Those who knew how to protect themselves with a knobkerry and small shield had no scars on their heads, but there were many long ago who had scars from fighting in the herding time. Children of the chief were in the same predicament—if they could not defend themselves they were beaten by their herding companions and possibly got their heads broken. The flowing of blood was not considered very serious, only if one did it in a stealthy way then he had to pay compensation. In this way the boys grew up with stout hearts and loved fighting.

Another thing which excited the boys was the custom of whistling. The boys were very expert and quick in expressing changes of mood in whistling. This was done so that the cattle would go carefully or quickly, but also when they were fighting the herders loved to whistle and even the older men in war did so also. The whistling stirred up the hearts of those who were thinking of running away. There were many ways of whistling and some were very good at it.

[198]

539 702

Enlistment

When the young men reached the age of 21–26 they left off herding. Sometimes it was their fathers who stopped them, sometimes they themselves wished to stay at home. They took their shields (*amahawu*) and

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643 682 all their things. Even when the Paramount agreed that a man should be killed he ordered that all his possessions were to come to him, stock, slaves, wives and children. These were called *izixi zenkosi*, the things of the Paramount, and they were divided among the houses of the Paramount, and the master of the man killed got nothing. This was done to teach the fathers of the villages that they should not sentence their people to death because they coveted their goods or people. The Paramount taught them by taking all the belongings of the one killed and they got nothing. Of course the Paramount's and chiefs' villages grew quickly in this way. At the beginning the punishment for adultery and murder was death; in adultery both the man and the woman were killed. Beginning from the time of Mbelwa and Mtwalo the penalty for adultery has been changed. The man who did it was despoiled of his goods or paid compensation. The courts agreed that any man wronged by such adultery could go with a war-party to the village of the guilty man and take what he wanted, but not kill any person. The Paramount took no notice of such an affair.

684 178

671 No account of the conduct of cases in Ngoni courts would be complete without reference to the popular interest in and support for the law. After a day in the courts the *izinduna* and the *amadoda* talked of almost nothing else. They went over and over the details of the cases, and recalled former cases of a similar kind and compared the judgements given. They criticized each other sharply for the handling of cases, and such criticism was taken well on the whole, as a contribution to the process of interpreting and enforcing the law rather than as a personal affront. The attendance of the public at the court sessions was encouraged so long as they observed due decorum. When talking broke out among the onlookers, the *induna* in charge bellowed 'Silence' in a voice of thunder. If a group of women continued to chatter and giggle after the *induna* had called for silence, he told them to go home. The interest in courts and cases extended to the play of children and to the conduct by the boys of their own affairs in the *laweni* or boys' dormitory. I often saw the young son of a chief or *induna* organizing his playmates into a court and allocating roles to them and in his play imitating the voice and gestures of his father.

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NGONI OFFICE-BEARERS

In Chapter II of Part I we stated that the main element in the Ngoni political system in the 1930's was a ruling aristocracy supported by a hierarchy of officials. In this chapter we shall first look at two texts, one by Cibambo on the northern kingdom and the other by a big *induna* in the central kingdom, explaining the relationship of the different office-bearers to the Paramount. We shall see how there were in effect two groups of office-bearers, one related to the territorial divisions of the kingdoms, and the other consisting of state or national officials and those connected with the royal village. There was no set of terms which could

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with the main activities of the groups, though it did to some extent illustrate mutual relationships.

Age-Set terms

	Northern Ngoni	*Central Ngoni*
All children	*abantwana*	*ana*
Young men even if married	*amajaha*	*anyamata*
Young girls before puberty	*inhakazana*	*mabuthu*
Young girls past puberty	*izintombi*	*anamwali*
All married women	*abafazi*	*ahazi*
Senior men	*amadoda*	*madoda*
Senior women	*amanina*	*manina*

One of the most characteristic forms of Ngoni village organization was the *laweni*, or boys' dormitory. It included the older boys in the group called 'children' and the young men until they married, who were in fact called *amajaha* after they had left the *laweni* and married and had huts of their own. The age for entering the *laweni* was approximately seven years, and was as a rule determined by the age when a child began to get his second teeth. When a child was going about the village with several gaps in his front teeth, his companions jeered at him if he still slept in his grandmother's hut, and his father took the view that it was time he stopped playing like a child and took up seriously the job of herding goats and calves. There was often some hesitation, especially among boys who were not so well grown for their age, at taking the plunge and going to live in the *laweni*, since once made the step could not be retraced. It was primarily an individual decision. It meant leaving the protective affectionate care of the grandmother in the evenings, and the care-free play all day round the mother's hut with meals provided by her, for a different sort of existence altogether. *Laweni* life was rigorous and was dominated by the senior boys living in the hut. The younger ones were at their mercy, and were made to 'fag' for their elders, clean up the hut, sometimes steal food from their mothers' stores, and were beaten if they were slow or careless, or if they threatened to tell the elders in the village what went on in the *laweni*. The main weapon to get boys into the *laweni* was the ridicule of their fellows. Once members of the *laweni* group they were disciplined into obedience by threats and beating. The age range within a *laweni* was often considerable, from seven to seventeen years.

All the boys in a *laweni* who were members of houses possessing cattle—and this as a rule included all sons of Ngoni families of trans-Zambesi clans—had to take part in herding. Cattle-herding was a responsible task and could be an arduous one. The boys got up before dawn, opened the gate of the kraal, and took the cattle to water. They milked the cattle on an open space near the village and carried the milk in wooden jars, gourds or petrol tins to the owner of the cattle, keeping

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some for themselves as their perquisite. They then drove the cattle to pasture, and this might be some distance away when grass was scarce in the dry season. They sometimes drove the cattle back near the village to rest at noon under the shade trees, but if the pasture was far away the cattle rested there and went on feeding later. They were brought back to the kraal in the late afternoon and counted by one of the senior men.

The herd-boys taught each other to fight with sticks, to wrestle, to catch rats and small birds, to use the knobkerry, catapults, and bows and arrows. Sometimes in the afternoon they went to other villages and challenged another herd to a fight between bulls.[1] During the long day's herding, the boys used to drink milk, make *amasi* (milk curds) in a gourd and eat it, bake birds in clay and roast ears of maize taken from their mothers' grain stores. Precedence among the herd-boys depended first on age and only secondly on the rank and position of the families they belonged to. There was an easily recognizable air of authority and almost of arrogance among the older boys responsible for their fathers' and uncles' cattle. They superintended the process of letting out the cattle, milking them, driving them to pasture and the return to the kraal in the evening. Mounted on donkeys, wearing large straw hats made by themselves, the senior boys acted like ranch owners bossing up inefficient work hands.

This period of living in the *laweni* was, as we have seen, shared by boys of a wide age group. In a large village where there were two or three or four *laweni*, there was often one in each section, which generally meant that the boys belonging to one *banja* or section shared one *laweni*. This had the effect of dividing them up to some extent on a basis of family and rank, but in a *laweni* serving a whole village all the boys went in together whatever families they came from. There was no respecting of clan status in the *laweni* and young boys of high-ranking families had to wait on and obey older boys of lower rank. *Laweni* life was therefore a democratizing influence among the boys of the village, and no boys were excused from herding cattle because they belonged to a house which owned cattle. Even if some went to school and others did not, the school-boys had to take their share of herding in the holidays. Ngoni chiefs and leading men laid great emphasis on keeping the boys busy and making them carry out the work allotted to them. The older boys began to listen in at court cases and to discuss them among themselves. During the wet season from time to time they formed hoeing parties for clearing new ground and for the periodical weeding of gardens. They seldom did any continuous cultivation, as the women and the older men did, and a boy who liked to go off and hoe by himself was pointed out as one with rather peculiar tastes.

During this period of *laweni* life, when in addition to herding the

[1] For the relation between the training of herd-boys and preparation for war, see Part II, Chap. I, p. 30.

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emphasized this, and was a reminder of their careful bringing up in their father's village surrounded by their attendant girls and older women.

Many of the *umuindo* songs referred to well-known events in Ngoni history. Others were warnings against jealousy when living in a polygynous household. One of these, said to be a lament of the women about the difficulties of polygynous households, was very popular in the northern kingdom and was used by Ngoni ministers in the churches when speaking against polygamy, even though the actual words of the song seemed to be referring to a historical event.

The boys and girls went through one common ceremony about the age of seven, when their second teeth were coming. The local tribes practised various forms of scarification, including facial tribal markings. The Ngoni never did this in the past and said that they despised it. Their distinctive marking was the piercing of the ear lobes in order to insert a small piece of reed, or a stud, or some beads. Formerly, when captives were taken in war, or when a village was conquered and annexed, the local people, especially the younger men, were forced to have their ears pierced as a condition of service in the regiments. After the Europeans came, the forcible ear-piercing was resisted by the local tribes, but among the Ngoni, especially those of trans-Zambesi clans, it continued to be practised, and I saw it being carried out in several villages. It was done in the dry cold-weather months, usually by one of the senior women of the children's family or house, and included all the children of about the same age who wanted to have their ears pierced. The woman pierced the lobe with a thorn, or a needle if she had one, and threaded some cotton through the hole. A day or so later they put in tiny bits of grass and replaced these with larger and larger bits until the hole was considered the right size.

After this ear-piercing ceremony, the boys' and girls' groups developed on their separate lines until their members became interested in each other as members of the opposite sex. Then, as I said at the beginning of the chapter, the groups of youths and girls were the two most prominent age groups in a village. They paid great attention to their clothes, washed with sweet-smelling leaves, used fats to anoint their hair, and the girls wore bead ornaments in their hair and on neck and wrists. Thus adorned, they spent their leisure time, especially in the cold weather after harvest, visiting other villages, usually in separate groups of youths and girls, except when they went as a team to dance *ngoma* in a neighbouring village.

In the social life of young people in Ngoni villages, the *ngoma* dance played an important part, especially in the northern kingdom. It took place after the harvest and was organized on a 'village team' basis. The boys practised their dance outside the cattle kraal in the evenings, and the girls did their dancing by themselves as a rule. But on the occasion

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of an *ngoma* 'competition' the team was made up of lads and girls of about fourteen to eighteen years old. They went off to another village, having announced their arrival previously, and challenged the 'home team' to dance *ngoma*. The dancing was in the kraal with the adults looking on and acting as judges. It was all very decorous and orderly and the competing teams were in dead earnest. As we have noticed already, the Ngoni danced without drums. The steady beat of the feet of the young men made the rhythm for the dance, but the co-ordination in the long lines of boys in front and girls behind needed assiduous practice to produce harmonious results. In both northern and central Ngoniland the Paramounts had forbidden all dances except Ngoni dances, and in the north the *ngoma* was encouraged by the chiefs because it was considered a 'good dance' for young people.

After marriage, the young women were absorbed in the care of their huts and young children and only appeared as an age set when they took part in a communal hoeing; on such occasions they were inclined to keep apart from the older women, sometimes on the grounds that they did not drink the full-strength beer, and therefore clustered round a pot of 'sweet' beer when they knocked off work. In most Ngoni villages the young men after marriage went off to find work and, as a group of friends within an age set, they would get together to talk things over, make their preparations and travel to the south.

In day-to-day village affairs, as well as on ceremonial occasions, the age sets of the *manina* and *madoda* were very much in evidence. The *madoda* met at meal-times by the gate of the kraal, and they went there to count the cattle when they came back in the evening. The same group could be seen either at the kraal gate or on a verandah talking about village affairs or drinking together, or at a court listening to cases. The *manina* usually gathered in the verandah of the *indlunkulu* to talk over women's affairs or to receive guests. As an age set they met less frequently than the men because the larger part of their tasks lay in their own huts or in the group of women associated with a house. On all occasions when the formal reception of strangers took place, or when ritual feasting or shaving or washing occurred, or when important decisions had to be made, the *manina* and the *madoda* in their separate sets were in evidence.

Although the age sets in village life were social units carrying definite responsibilities and performing recognized activities, their chief importance in Ngoni social life was in regulating behavioural patterns and prescribing mutual relationships. Here we have to take note of a selective principle at work among the *manina* and *madoda*. Although in one sense all women and men of forty to forty-five and upwards belonged to these age sets, the individuals who carried out the characteristic activities of these groups did not include all the men and women of that age. The very old people did not continue to exercise any influence in village

539 867 The moral, which was always repeated at the end as part of the story, was that children were warned not to show unkindness to people but to treat them well so that people would bless them. They were reminded that the older sister showed the qualities of pity, courage and obedience, while the younger sister did not hesitate to display disgust and fear and carelessness. It was the older sister who had her ultimate reward as leading wife of a handsome chief, while the younger sister, as a subsidiary wife, had to take second place.

These two folk-tales were popular among the children, even though they were so different from the animal folk-tales, full of humour and absurdities. The children used to shiver with excitement over the Brass-Rod story, especially the little girls, and the boys sucked in their breath when the wind blew and snapped their fingers for the rattling in the pit. Because the stories were serious and had a didactic purpose, Ngoni fathers approved of them, and encouraged the grandmothers to tell them often in order that the children might remember the moral.

Learning how to behave

203 857 [202] Ngoni villages, like the whole Ngoni kingdom, had an efficient system of communication between individuals and groups, but whereas the kingdom had a network of official messengers continually moving between the capital and the outlying sections, the village 'intercom' depended on the children. At any time of day, from first light till after dark, children were moving about the village from one hut to another, from a hut to the kraal gate, taking messages, summoning people, carrying food, reporting arrivals. The messages and summons were all at the bidding of the adults.

576 857 867 202 When a child was called to take a message, he had to respond immediately wherever he was, and run to hear what he was wanted for. Someone calling a child's name, followed by a long drawn out 'Yo—o—o', punctuated all the hours of daylight in a village. When a child was told to call someone

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older, on reaching them he had to bend one knee, or sit down, and say in a low but clear voice: 'They are calling you.' If a child was sent to call another child to his father because he had a scolding to administer, the bad child had to listen with head bent down, not saying a word or making a sound until the father had finished all he had to say, whether the accusation was just or not. If the child forgot himself and answered back or made excuses, the onlookers would beat the child for being rude to his father. If when taking a message a child had to pass a line or a group of people, he had always to go in front of them, never behind, bending forward from the waist and murmuring as he went by, 'I am before your eyes.' If a child had to give an adult a food basket or any other object, he had to offer it with both hands and bend slightly over it; and when he received it back he always did so with both hands outstretched and bent head.

Acting as messengers constantly, and no child was immune from being called if he or she was in the village, impressed on children from their early years the chief behavioural skills of language and deportment. Taking a message was always a formal occasion, and standards of behaviour in language, posture and gesture were rigidly enforced. We shall see in later chapters how very small children were first taught to thank people for gifts or in response to a greeting, and later to greet people politely themselves. The correct terms in which to address or to refer to relatives formed another stage in learning language skills, and later on came reminders about the use of pronouns and the use of the second person singular and plural of verbs, the first to equals only, the second to all adults, with the third person plural for chiefs and 'great ones'. About the age of five or six a child was told: 'When your mother speaks to a stranger she says "Please (you) sit here". You should speak like this to all people you must honour. Only rude people speak that other way—people who do not know how to thank and how to honour, not like the Ngoni who know these things.'

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to himself: 'Can that be for me? No? Yes? It *is* me. I am ashamed.' No one said anything but the shamed one took the first chance of slipping away to avoid further public notice. The use of proverbs in this way were an effective way of making a child learn for himself and apply the lesson; and with children, as with adults, the use of proverbs was a way of 'saving face' when a direct rebuke in the presence of others would have caused overwhelming shame.

Ngoni ideas about nature and nurture

This fixed code of social behaviour between persons was instilled by Ngoni adults into their children from their early years. By the time they had their second teeth, a significant stage to the Ngoni, they were expected to conduct themselves towards other people according to this code. Their behaviour, in public at any rate, should be predictable, if those responsible for the teaching of 'respect' had carried out their task conscientiously. But, as the Ngoni themselves recognized, it was one thing to have a system of training with a desired goal in view. It was another thing to see how each individual child responded to the training, and either conformed to the code or resisted it. The Ngoni thought that the clue to conformity or resistance lay in the individual's character, and they talked a great deal about the character of their children. Such conversations generally arose when adults were watching a group of boys and girls carrying out a socially required or self-appointed task. They might be bringing back the cattle in the evening, practising for the *ngoma* dance, grinding bulrush millet for snacks for the little children, asking each other riddles or telling a story. Some of the tasks called for intelligence, some for physical strength, some for initiative or organizing ability, some for eloquence.

Character, so the Ngoni thought, came from two sources, inborn qualities and acquired qualities. The first they called *mabadidwe*, literally those things which an individual was born with. These included physical resemblances to their

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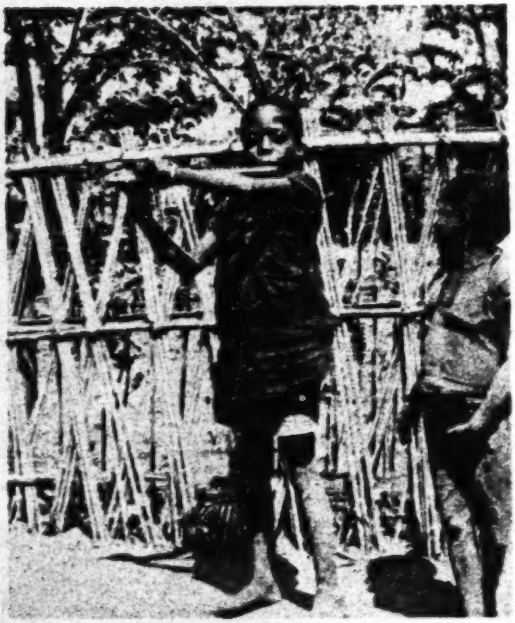

10. Young musicians

[facing page 49]

sieves for straining beer or water poured through ashes to make salt. These lay around all day if they were being used, and were periodically scrubbed and put on the rack to dry, and at night stacked tidily in the veranda. In the day-time sleeping-mats of finely woven fibre were brought out into the sun, and so were skins and cloths used as coverings at night. Some of the Ngoni used curved wooden headrests as pillows often carved at the ends with animals' heads to fascinate a small child.

On the polished space in front of the hut were laid from time to time mats on which sprouting millet for making beer was dried, or partly pounded damp maize. A young child was sometimes told to keep the fowls and dogs off these mats. These animals and often small kids, wandered and pecked and scratched and quarrelled inside the fence all day, and young children chased them.

Beyond the fence lay other fenced compounds grouped round the cattle kraal, and beyond the village buildings lay patches of woodland, grass pastures, cultivated 'gardens', and water-holes and streams. Going with the mother or grandmother or a nurse girl or helper to fetch water, or work in the gardens was an expedition for young children which they delighted in.

In these village surroundings there were some places forbidden to young children, who were corrected by everyone with smacks and stern reproofs until they learned to keep away. One such forbidden place was the kraal gateway where the men sat and talked and ate. No woman until she had passed the menopause was allowed to cross over in front of the gateway lest she injure the cattle. If therefore children strayed down there, younger women did not like to go and fetch them back, as the men always grumbled if women went there lest they should harm the cattle. It was nevertheless a place that had a great attraction for boys of five to seven years old, because they found their fathers there and the herd boys. The boys in this age-group of five to seven showed

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after the age of four or five, when they might become aware that intercourse was taking place. From this age, when the Ngoni said 'they will now begin to see things and to ask questions', they went to sleep either with a widowed grandmother or senior helper.

During the 'dark half of the month' and in the rains, most people went to bed soon after dark and little children got a long sleep. When the moon was bright, and in dry weather, the whole village was astir, walking around, dancing, talking, visiting. Little children tagged round with their older sisters or nurse girls, and if they were sleepy were either picked up and carried, or put in the hut to sleep on their mat, provided there was no fire burning into which they could fall. During the day, especially in the hot weather, children dropped off to sleep just where they were, on the veranda, under the platform, or in some other shady spot.

It was just before bedtime, in the grandmother's hut, that traditional folk-tales were told, round the last flickers of a wood fire. Sometimes a child dropped off to sleep before the story was finished. Someone either took him on her lap, or dumped him on his mat and covered him up.

This acquiring of habits, directed consciously by adults, was designed to give the child increasingly a sense of being part of a community which had certain standards of behaviour. There were, in this training, some prohibitions which a child was expected to observe as soon as he could walk and talk. The most stringent was on any form of sex play between boys and girls. To avoid any likelihood of this, little boys and girls were early encouraged to form separate play groups. The elders kept an eye particularly on the boys, and if they showed any inquisitiveness in their play about the private parts of a girl playmate, they were beaten and reproved and told: 'If you do this again, I shall tell your father.'

Many little boys and girls up to the age of four or five ran about naked, but in leading Ngoni families they wore a scrap

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of cloth hanging in front from a bead or grass waistband. They were all taught before that age, and most stringently after it, to sit correctly. For the little girls, this meant kneeling first and then sitting with the legs tucked on one side. They always smoothed down their scrap of cloth so that their genitals were covered. Little boys often squatted, sitting on their heels. Their correct position however, especially when eating food, was to sit with their legs crossed and the soles of their feet pressed against their thighs, and their cloth or skin apron arranged to cover their genitals.

Any rudeness in speech or action towards parents or elders was corrected at once, and the child was told: 'That is not the Ngoni way.' Studied courtesy included looking down when addressed by an elder, and as we saw in Chapter II, never walking behind a group of elders but passing in front of them, bending slightly forward and murmuring: 'I am before your eyes.'

Play places and playthings

In spite of what appeared like a somewhat restrictive régime, Ngoni children were merry and busy all their waking hours. Occasionally lack of health, or an awkward temperament, produced a child who sat around by himself, or glowered at other children, or was spiteful and vindictive. For the most part their nurse girls and older sisters paid them the attention they demanded, were always ready to provide distractions and amusements, and showed them how to use all that lay around them as playthings.

The places where they played depended on their age and mobility. The youngest children stayed round the hut and inside the fence. Occasionally the nurse girls and older sisters in the afternoons took them to a 'playground' on the outskirts of the village, where the older girls were accustomed to meet and practise dancing, or to thread beads and chatter. When the harvest was in, some of the older children about five and six years old, helped by the nurse girls, made 'play

3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
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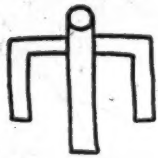
houses' among the maize stalks, tying the stalks together to make conical shelters. There they played house, pretending to cook and pound. But the enthusiasm for these playhouses was shortlived, and on the whole the children and their nurse girls preferred to be in the village where they could see and hear what was going on. The older boys in this age-group seldom went to the playground, and pursued their games in the open spaces of the village.

The small girls had 'dolls' which they treated as little babies. Sometimes it was a maize cob tucked into a bit of cloth and carried on their backs. More realistic dolls were made of a bundle of reeds tied together with the hard round shell of a fruit fitted on top and painted with eyes, nose and mouth. Older girls made these dolls for the little ones, and showed them how to feed the doll from a tiny gourd and taught them lullabies to sing while they jogged the dolls on their back or nursed them on their lap.

Little boys had a wider range of toys, made for them by older brothers and quickly copied by the children themselves. They made windmills from maize sheaths which twisted on a stick as they ran. They had hoops of bamboo peelings, trundled with a notched stick, and a small round solid wooden wheel with a hole in it which they pushed with a long-handled crook. They had tops of wood and whipped them with lengths of bark rope. They were for ever collecting scraps of iron from wherever men were working. These they sharpened on stones, and used as knives, or bound them to a haft, as a little axe, with fragments of skin which they scrounged when a shield was being cut, or an ox flayed. The small boys were the tinkers of the village, collecting whatever scrap they thought they could use, and hiding it each in his own safe and secret place, and fighting savagely if anyone robbed a secret store. Many boys spent hours making clay figures, men, cattle, monkeys, dogs, and there were certain conventions which allowed little variety governing their style and shape. Sometimes they drew, or 'wrote' as they

857 said, in the sand more conventional figures of men and
532 animals which are reproduced here. Their ingenuity in the use of local materials was boundless, and led later to remarkably accurate scale models of lorries and aeroplanes made from pith, bamboo and thorns.



A man

A wild pig

A baboon

A dog

A cow

857 Most of the games such as tops and hoops were seasonal. They appeared suddenly in the village, lasted for a few weeks and then ceased as abruptly as they had begun. A perennial amusement among Ngoni boys of five to seven was playing at law courts. They sat round in traditional style with a 'chief' and his elders facing the court, the plantiffs and defendants presenting their case, and the counsellors conducting proceedings and cross-examining witnesses. In their high squeaky voices the little boys imitated their fathers whom they had seen in the courts, and they gave judgements, imposing heavy penalties, and keeping order in the court with ferocious severity. Another game which the boys of five to seven enjoyed was a form of tug-of-war, two gangs pulling on a bark rope, until one gave way, with shouting, whistling and a final cry: 'The strong ones. They prevail.'

000 In the dry season which was the dancing season children

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In the dry season which was the dancing season children from three and four years upwards spent hours watching the older boys and girls dancing. On the edge of the main group small boys particularly would with intense solemnity and exaggerated movements practise steps and postures, singing meanwhile. The Ngoni used no drums and no musical instruments in their dancing, and despised the users of drums. All their rhythm and synchrony was achieved by perfect unison of action and voice. The little boys practising solo on the edge of a dance-group listened intently every now and then to get the rhythm correctly, shifted their feet and stamped with the rest.

The little girls were collected together by older girls now and then, and sometimes joined by the boys, to play games of catch and various miming games such as choosing a lover, hen and chickens, slave-raiding, baboons in the maize gardens. These were accompanied by songs in which the leader, or 'owner', of the game sang the story and the rest joined in the refrains. Many of these miming games called for alertness and co-operation, and the slow and solitary were soon shown up and laughed at. Another set of songs with refrains were ballads or stories without action, and these were listened to by the hour by the younger children towards the end of the day, especially if the singer of the ballad was a lively narrator.

Girl children of this age-group spent a lot of their time watching adults and older girls doing their household work. In time they learned to imitate the actions of pounding and grinding, using a small pole or a stone, of sweeping with a frayed-out stalk, of winnowing or sieving with a little basket, or ladling food with a tiny wooden spoon. When they went to the gardens with their mother, they were given a small branch to carry home on their heads for the fire. Later the little girls had a tiny pot put on their head, perched on a miniature grass carrying-ring and went to the water-hole with their nurse girl to fill it and carry it home without spilling the water.

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Young Ngoni children among their siblings and age-mates

593 855 The hard-worked theme of sibling rivalry among small children in a family was not obvious among young Ngoni children. I expected to see outbursts of jealousy when the ex-baby returned after weaning to his mother's compound and found another baby installed there. But even with the new baby present, the mother seemed to have time to pet the ex-baby, telling the nurse girl to leave him with her, and there were few overt signs of emotional tension. This was certainly due to a large extent to the nurse-girl pattern, the fenced compound which was the child's home, and the interest of older sisters in their younger brothers and sisters. Young children growing up, as we have seen, were the focus of attention for a group of girls and women of different ages. They were hardly ever in a situation in which they had to struggle to assert themselves against a sibling, or, in their early years, against their age-mates. If they felt slighted or miserable or hungry or tired they could always go to someone to be petted or fed.

Hence their emotional needs for affection and attention never seemed to be unsatisfied. They were accustomed to having their physical needs supplied by any one of several women, and did not depend only on their mother for these needs. Nurse girls and older sisters were often demonstrative to small children, and they got more actual petting from them than from their mother or grandmother. Young children in turn often petted one smaller than themselves, or a new baby, and there was a contented affectionate relationship between children in the home which indicated the absence of any acute sibling rivalry.

857 561 From about the age of five or six, boys, who were escaping from the restrictions and security of the compound to the freedom and competition of village life, found a new challenge in a large group of their own age-mates, also just coming out of the younger child seclusion of the home. Boys

of this age, escaping from the women, showed their independence in their choice of games and occupations, many of which, as we have seen, were of an individual nature. They were not much inclined to join together as an age-group except for occasional gang enterprises. If one boy interfered with another's game of tops or took away his axe or hoop, there was an immediate short sharp fight. The defeated one either ran home to be comforted, with the jeers of the victor in his ears, or he stood and sulked for a moment, and then went on with his pursuit. It was outside in the open village spaces and not behind the fences of the compounds that small boys learned to put up with each other, to meet aggression and to be aggresive in turn, and then suddenly to gang up with a group and play happily together.

The test for boys of correct Ngoni training in the childhood stage, between weaning and second teeth, was their ability to get on with their age-mates and fellow villagers when they went to live in the dormitory. One boy went to live for long periods with his maternal grandmother in his mother's home village, after an argument in which for once his father was overruled by his wife and her family. This boy was indulged and spoiled by his maternal relatives who were afraid to correct him and to discipline him because he was the child of their son-in-law. The result was that when the boy came back about the age of seven, on his father's insisting that he should take part in herding and live in the dormitory, he was selfish, rude and disobedient, and failed to fit in with the other boys. This and similar stories were often quoted to show the importance of the father's family being in sole control during the early stages of childhood.

VILLAGE LIFE FOR OLDER BROTHERS AND SISTERS

There was no doubt that this abrupt transition, like the sudden weaning, was a shock for many boys between six-and-a-half and seven-and-a-half. From having been impudent, well-fed, self-confident and spoiled youngsters among the women many of them quickly became skinny, scruffy, subdued and with a hunted expression. The subdued and hunted looks passed off as they adjusted themselves to their new environment and there were boys, generally those exceptionally well grown and physically strong, who showed no apparent signs of shock. They all, however, showed the effects of irregular and inadequate feeding. The younger boys were chronically hungry and their hair and skin and bony knees and ribs were eloquent of calory, protein and vitamin shortages.

The other main purpose of dormitory life in Ngoni culture was to mix up all the boys in the village and let the common life together teach them how to get on with their age-mates and knuckle under to their superiors in age. Age and strength were the only criteria for authority. Older brothers might try to protect and intercede for younger brothers but it was not encouraged. All the young ones had to take their chance equally, without regard for their family name or their father's position.

The dormitory was primarily a sleeping-place, but through the group of boys who slept there the herding of cattle was organized and the off-duty amusements and occupations of the older boys were planned. The young ones had to 'fag' for the rest, fetching wood and water, keeping fires going, sweeping the hut, taking messages, huddling in a corner at night when the oldest boys brought girls in, and submitting to beatings both as a warning and as a punishment. They were usually beaten once or twice soon after their arrival and then threatened with much worse if they ever divulged what went on in the dormitory. It was not however a torture house, far from it, and the boys boasted of belonging to 'our dormitory' and were proud of having their own hidden life

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524 of the riddle. An unexpected reply or a good guess often drew applause, even if it was not the accepted correct answer.

535 857 Before it was dark, all the herd-boys joined in what they called 'drill' on the flat space where they milked the cows in front of the kraal gate. As a rule this 'drill' was practising for the *ngoma* dance which took place after harvest and was the only dance for boys and girls approved by the Ngoni rulers. Sometimes they varied this dance, practising with swift follow-my-leader manœuvres, turning, twisting, lifting sticks, knocking knobkerries together, stamping, whistling.

[534] As we have said already, the Ngoni had no drums, and all the precision and rhythm in any dances or concerted movements depended on exact timing and following the leader. The accuracy and precision reached was remarkable, and represented a high degree of intense concentration and co-operation among the dancers or 'drillers', who developed an almost intuitive knowledge of what the leader was going to do next. This dancing was practised in front of the men and older youths on purpose. They criticized it freely, and sometimes, though rarely, praised the boys. More often they came forward to show them how to do it better.

233 857 For the greater part of the day the herd-boys were with the cattle. They rose before it was light, undid the kraal gate, and as dawn broke led the cattle to the river. Then they went to the grazing grounds which according to the season were near or far from the village. As the dry season advanced and the grass became poorer, they had to go farther afield to find grazing. They returned to the village about ten o'clock

[234] and milked the cows and took the milk in gourds to the senior women, keeping some as their own perquisite. The cattle were driven under some trees to rest during the heat of the day, and taken to the grazing ground again about two and brought back about five, watered and put in the kraal and the gate was closed. Variations in this time-table depended on the seasons, the quality of the pasture, and on whether the herd-boys went to school or not.

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VILLAGE LIFE FOR OLDER BROTHERS AND SISTERS

The youngest boys were not expected to herd cattle until they were ten or eleven years old. Their work was to look after the calves, sheep and goats, sometimes following the cattle to the grazing ground, sometimes wandering round the edge of the village, avoiding the cultivated areas until after harvest. At that time cattle, calves, sheep and goats were driven into the stubble and left to forage.

As a result of dormitory life, combined with cattle-herding, a definite ideal herd-boy personality developed. This was fostered by the hero-worship of the older herd-boys by the young ones. It was also built up by the praise or blame meted out for herding well or badly by the older herd-boys to younger ones, and by the cattle-owners. This 'ideal herdsman' was used by Ngoni ministers and teachers living in the villages to relate their teaching about Christianity to the life around them. Prayers near the kraal, conducted by an Ngoni minister each evening, or before people went on a journey, often began with the words 'Jesus our shepherd, keep us well'. Young teachers often said to me how they always listened as boys when a prayer began like this, and that in school their favourite Bible story was that of David the herd-boy.

When there was a school in the village or near by which the Ngoni elders approved of, the herd-boys had a busy life. They watered the cattle very early, took them to graze and milked them. Then they went to school from ten to two, taking the cattle out grazing afterwards. In the cold weather they went to school from six to ten and herded cattle the rest of the day, after the sun had dried the dew off the grass. School attendance depended on the attitude of fathers to the new learning, and how the village elders regarded the local mission and its teachers. The boys whose fathers had no cattle, in general the non-Ngoni elements in the village, were free to attend school continuously since they had no herding responsibilities. There was some jeering among the boys in the dormitory at those who only went to school and did not

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given to giggling and putting their head on one side when asked questions. They took their school work seriously in order to show that they, the Ngoni girls, were the intelligent ones. They were also aware that the number of cattle to be transferred at their marriage would be greater according to whether they finished school in Standard II, III, IV, or even VI.

Apart from going to school, which was only for the daughters of relatively forward-looking Ngoni fathers, the girls continued to take part in the daily routine of the household. They and their companions, according to their growth and strength and pleasure, did a little pounding, fetching water, grinding grain, roasting ground-nuts. In a large household, where there were many helpers, the daughters of the family only did as much as they felt inclined of the domestic chores. As they said: 'It was like our play.' They spent more time with the young children, or washing themselves and their clothes by the stream. Combing and dressing their hair, rubbing fat or oil on their skin, threading beads, plaiting grass or fibres, learning how to make Ngoni bead designs for head bands or wristlets—all these formed the lighter and more amusing side of the daily routine.

From among the girls in this exclusive and protected girls' circle, Ngoni girls chose a particular friend, whom they always addressed as 'my friend', even if she were a classificatory sister or cousin. As with the boys in the dormitory this friend was a confidante to whom a girl could talk freely about her life in the compound, her likes and dislikes among the other girls and women, her ideas about suitors and marriage. The friend was always from another compound and of a leading Ngoni clan. The two friends made bracelets and necklets for each other, and went to bathe in the stream together. Sometimes the friendship lasted until the girls were married and separated. At times it broke up suddenly in a violent quarrel. There was however a curious tenacity about these friendship pacts, and they were more often maintained

837 578 believes that her husband is committing adultery with another woman she endeavours to find out who the woman is. She usually refuses to speak to her when they meet, and if they are forced to come into contact, as at a beer party, there is likely to be a fight between them. A parturient woman may ask her midwife to pretend that there are difficulties in labour so that her husband can be called upon to confess his adultery and name his mistress.

864 The sexual aspect of marriage influences the training and experiences of children. The explanation given for moving children from their parents' hut to a dormitory at the age of six or seven is that by then children are 'wise enough' and will talk to their playmates about their parents' sexual activities in the hut. Girls aged [897] five years or so start to imitate the dances of their elders and to join in the dance competitions when girls come from other villages. [533] Many of the songs sung at these dances are concerned with various aspects of sexual relations. At age ten, or sometimes earlier they [535] also begin to practice the most important of the women's erotic dances, *cimwangalala*,[11] which is performed only indoors. At a 881 girl's first menstruation she is secluded for from a few days up to a 864 month, and is tested by women who have borne [illegible]en to see that she can dance *cimwangalala* and other erotic d[illegible]ces effectively, that she knows the formalities of copulation, and how to behave when she menstruates. Even where the girl is secluded for the full month, and her training is accompanied by a great deal of symbolism and ceremonial, there is little reference to her potential fertility.

864 There is no formal instruction in sexual matters for boys, and there are no erotic dances for them. They learn their sexlore from their older companions in the bush or in the dormitory. The only [831] specific aspect of sexual maturation that appears to receive emphasis is the growth of large testicles, and boys brew themselves medicines to expedite this.

842 832 Both fertility and sexual satisfaction can be facilitated by the use of medicines. There is a well-known medicine for the cure of barrenness, and there are many kinds of aphrodisiacs.[12] A girl [864] learns the use of aphrodisiacs from other women in the village, and she is formally taught sexual behaviour by her puberty instructress.[13] The old woman who is in charge of her puberty seclusion, who is 881 sometimes the girl's grandmother, supervises the sexual behaviour 593 of the girl for the first few years of her married life. If, as a bride, she succeeds in forcing her husband to give her a present before she will lie with him, the present must be handed over to the puberty instructress the next morning. Later she may demonstrate her [535] erotic proficiency by dancing[14] in the hut before her husband and her instructress.

[11] Meaning, in Nsenga, 'the thing of you just sleeping' (i.e. copulating).
[12] Such as *mtololo*, a root, and *kajelejela*, a plant.
[13] *Mphungu*.
[14] The dance is called *cikapa*. Cf. Nyanja *kapakapa*, swinging backwards and forwards.

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turn to a younger brother for help in arranging a marriage, but although it is said that a man cannot marry the widow of a younger brother, this is sometimes done. The position of children born in a union of this kind is anomalous and there is likely to be dissension in the family if the elder brother has no children by his own wives.

10. Rights in wives and children

The new-born child sleeps in its mother's hut, is in danger from its father's adultery, and is held by its parents at their ritual resumption of sexual intercourse. It is carried to the garden on its mother's back and at mealtimes sucks porridge from her finger. Perhaps its father may play a little with it, but this is not very likely. After weaning, which takes place about the age of two, it may be sent to a grandparent or some other relative, or may perhaps remain in the parental hut for a few more years. But already it has been handled and probably suckled by many women, has learnt to play with the other young children in the village, and has gone off with them into the bush or to the stream. It has learnt also the correct kinship terms for most people in the village and has seen its village teams dance against those of other villages. It has gone visiting in other villages with its parents and has begun to explore its web of kinship, of which it is the centre.

The growing child therefore does not see its parents as sharply distinguished from all other adults in the vicinity, but merely as the two people to whom its ties are closest and on whom it is most dependent. If a child whose parents are dead or are living in Southern Rhodesia is brought up by a relative, it may not learn their names until it is adult, if then. Parents are important to their children only when they live near them or with them. It is when children grow up in the village of their parents that they rely on them for school fees, clothes and medicines. Later a boy may ask his father for financial help or may use him as a banker, handing over his wages to him.

This is true not only of a man's own children of whom he is both genitor and pater, but also of his wife's adulterine and pre-marital children, if he chooses to accept them into his household. It is clear that if a man has paid bridewealth, he has custody of all the children borne by his wife, in adultery as well as in wedlock. If he has not paid bridewealth, then adulterine children like legitimate children belong in theory to his wife's relatives. In practice a man can either accept or spurn them. If he has been away a long time and returns to find his wife with illegitimate children, he may decide to accept the children as his own. They then take his descent name and not that of their genitor. The biological parentage of such children is not mentioned openly, but is remembered in malicious gossip.

Case history 11

Laban went away to work in Southern Rhodesia. His wife Sara went

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PLATE XIV

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3. Boys crushing ground-nuts. The expressed oil will be used in a bird trap

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4. Boy playing with a toy motor-car made from maize stalks

NGONI

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233 are out at pasture all day under the charge of herdboys, and may be brought in for milking in the early afternoon, later returning to the bush. Alternatively they are not milked until they come in just before sunset to be put in their byres for the night. These activities are
● 857 organized by the herdboys, who range from five up to about twelve
233 years in age. All the boys in a village take part in herding, whether or not their parents own cattle. A man keeps all his cattle in the village in one byre, although he may also have cattle in other villages under the care of relatives. The boys attach themselves to definite byres, and the senior boy of the group becomes responsible for all the cattle in the byre. He sees that the cattle do not stray into gardens during the season when they may damage the crops, and he checks that all the
[868] cattle return at night. He instructs the younger boys in the art of milking, and supervises the allocation of the milk, which is his perquisite. Cattle from all the byres in the village may be herded together. After the harvest the cattle are often left to wander where they please and the boys occupy themselves in the village or hunting for rabbits until it is time to round up the cattle for milking.

628 There are no definite pastures associated with one village rather
233 than with another, so that the herds from one village may come into
857 contact with those from another. This may lead to fighting between
[541] the two groups of herdboys, and also, if it can be managed, between the bulls of the villages. Boys take pride in the fighting ability of their bulls, and sometimes seek out other herds in order to demonstrate the superior strength of themselves and their animals. It is significant that informants referred always to fights between bulls of different villages, and not of fights between bulls from different byres in the same village, although these do occur.

233 In the past, herding was carried out by older boys, and life as a herd-
833 boy was terminated only by enrolment into a regiment. Inter-village
857 fighting went on partly to demonstrate that the boys concerned were now strong enough to join the army. At the present time boys of twelve and younger are employed on tobacco farms, and many attend school. Some cattle owners have to pay boys to come from other villages to herd their cattle as there are no boys available in the village itself, while others obtain the services of young girls.

Inter-village Relationships

628 Villages are grouped together into counties, under a minor chief,
631 and in some counties there are recognized subdivisions that I shall

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near their farms, who go home every afternoon after work and come back the next morning. Others employ women and children, and most boys work intermittently on the farms to earn enough to keep themselves in clothes until they are old enough to go away to Southern Rhodesia. Other boys work in their holidays from school.

To some extent people from the same village tend to go to work together in groups on a farm. This is particularly true in the case of the short-term labourers who sleep at home, since the choice of farm is restricted to those in the immediate vicinity of the village. Here sometimes the majority of the inhabitants of a village will turn out under the leadership of the headman of the village and work for three or four days on the same farm. Longer-term labourers may be attracted to a farm by the presence of a foreman from their own village.

Girls also go to work on their own, and many marriages are made as a result of encounters on the farms. Marriages made in this way are not always recognized by the parents of the girl until the man has brought her back to her village and formally approached her parents.

The villages near the farms, and to a lesser extent those near the township, sell beer to the labourers, while the farms themselves buy up most of the maize and other cereals that villagers have to sell.

The continual demand for labour on the farms leads to their serving as a sanctuary for fugitives from social pressure of one kind or another. For example, a native policeman was going round the villages obtaining labour for the Administration for essential public works. He adopted the normal practice of imposing a quota of labourers to be supplied upon each village and made the headman responsible for seeing that his village quota was met. If the headman did not do this, he enlisted the headman as a labourer. At one village the headman told the policeman that his people had all run away to the gardens when they had heard of the arrival of the policeman in the area. The policeman warned the headman that either he must exercise his authority over his people and order them back into the village so that he could enlist them, or else the headman would be enlisted. He came back the next day to see what had happened, and found that the headman had gone off to work on a farm. There is machinery for recovering such people, but it does not work easily or quickly, and by the time a man has been located and brought back, the reason for which he was wanted may have fallen away.

Disputes between Africans on farms can be dealt with at the nearest Native Court, but if the farmer wishes to enforce his rights under the